DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 927 PS 022 531

AUTHOR	Gallagher, Vicky A.
TITLE	Facilitating School Transition through Effective Characterization of Skills and Collaborative Planning: The Elementary and Middle School Child.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	125p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova Southeastern University.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *Inservice Teacher Education; Junior High Schools; Middle Schools; Portfolio Assessment; Program Effectiveness; Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Staff Development; Student Evaluation; Student Needs; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Workshops; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

At a small, northeastern suburban elementary school, the records used to characterize the skills and to anticipate the needs of the diverse students in transition (between grades, school levels, or special to regular education programs) did not provide receiving teachers an effective assessment of current performance levels; nor was there adequate planning to facilitate student transitions. This practicum developed strategies to ensure greater success during periods of transition. One component was training initiatives to enable teachers to better assess student performance levels (especially using portfolios) and to deal effectively with special education needs. A second component expanded collaborative planning opportunities so teachers could work together, sharing ideas and expertise, to facilitate school transitions for students. Positive outcomes of the initiative were demonstrated by inclusion of individual education plan summaries and performance assessment data in student cumulative records. An informal survey of teachers revealed that the initiatives improved staff awareness of student strengths and needs, and increased support for orientation activities and participation in the transition planning process. Includes 16 appendices (survey forms; training and planning materials; evaluation and assessment forms; and survey results) are included. Contains 70 references. (TM)

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Facilitating School Transition
Through Effective Characterization of Skills and Collaborative Planning: The Elementary and Middle School Child

by

Vicky A. Gallagher

Cluster 43

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A Practicum II Report
presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1994

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Vicky A. Gallagher under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

May 11, 1994

Date of Final Approval
of Report

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is with sincere gratitude that the writer acknowledges the help and guidance of her beloved husband Dennis P. Gallagher. Without his continual patience and support, this work would not have been possible.

The writer also wishes to express her gratitude for the love of her family and the help and advice of her colleagues.

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ABSTRACT

Facilitating School Transition Through Effective Characterization of Skills and Collaborative Planning: The Elementary and Middle School Child. Gallagher, Vicky A., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies. Educational Practices/Elementary Education/ Middle Schools/Special Education/ Transitions/Assessment/Planning/Literature Reviews

The problem in the writer's work setting was that the records used to characterize the skills and anticipate the needs of diverse, elementary students in transition, did not provide receiving teachers an effective assessment of current performance levels. Also, there was inadequate or nonexistent planning to facilitate student transitions, to ensure adequate resources. The goal of the writer was that these early adolescent students would experience greater success during periods of school transition.

Several solution strategies were utilized to facilitate school transitions from grade to grade, from elementary to middle school, and from special education to regular education programs. A major component focused on training initiatives enabling teachers to better assess student performance levels and deal effectively in the classroom with special education needs. A second major component expanded collaborative planning opportunities so that teachers might work together, sharing their ideas and expertise, to facilitate school transitions for students.

An informal survey of staff revealed that the initiatives resulted in improved awareness of students' strengths and needs with the inclusion of Individual Education Plan summaries and performance assessment data in students' cumulative records. Staff members acknowledged improved orientation activities planned for students and acknowledged their support for implementation of these plans. Staff members also noted an increase in their involvement and participation in the transition planning process in the writer's building.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The writer's work setting was an elementary school in a small, suburban community in the northeast. Once a sparsely populated agricultural community, the proximity to major cities was a factor in the transformation to a mostly residential area. The 22,000 member community was predominantly Caucasian with no significant minority population. The community, generally considered upper middle class, was increasingly experiencing severe budget deficits and the effects of rising regional unemployment.

There was subsidized housing in the community for some 400 low income families, but most community members lived in neighborhoods of single family homes on tree lined streets. According to the 1990 Census of Population and Housing (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991), the median value of owner occupied homes was $231,300 in this community at the time of the census.

Many residents were employed in service industries or in technical fields. Recently, there had been substantial layoffs in defense industries and in technical fields in the region which were impacting some community members.

The community is the home of a small, private liberal arts college, a renowned college preparatory school, and several parochial schools. The local public school system included one early childhood education center, four elementary schools serving grades one through five, one middle school serving grades six through eight, and one comprehensive high school. Approximately 3,900 students were enrolled in the school system.

Summer school programs, enrichment programs, and extracurricular sports were enjoyed by many students. After graduation, 85% or more of the students go on to institutions of higher education. Before and after school child care was available in the schools. Chapter 1 services were provided in math in the elementary schools. Remedial reading services were available, and special education services were provided in every school for eligible students. Consistent with surrounding communities, approximately 15% of the total school population received special education support services. Approximately 5% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunches.

The school system was experiencing increased enrollment in the elementary grades and decreased enrollment in the upper grades. Physical space for instruction was at a premium. There were several portable classroom units in use and rented space in a local church was also utilized for classroom instruction. Construction of a new elementary school, which had been held in limbo for several years by severe budget limitations imposed by the community, was finally beginning. The school system laid off 25% of the total teaching staff at the close of the 1990-1991 school year due to budget deficits and was still struggling to recapture the staffing ratio of that school year.

Combined with the fact that there had been notable administrative changes in the last five years, it was clear that this school system was in a critical transition period.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The work setting of the writer was an elementary school with an enrollment of approximately 470 students in grades one through five. The two-story brick building was over 30 years old and was originally constructed as a junior high school. It was later converted to elementary use and was in need of updating and physical repair.

The school provided Chapter 1 services in math. Remedial reading services were available for students with demonstrated needs. Special education services were available for all students eligible under state and federal law. Approximately 17% of the students received special education services. Some 9% of students qualified for free or reduced lunches in the cafeteria.

The professional staff in the building included a principal, teaching assistant principal, and 17 regular education teachers. Additionally there were itinerant services provided in music, art, library sciences, and physical education. There were three special education teachers and five and one half, full-time special education instructional aides assigned to this school. A part-time guidance counselor was available for students and served as chairperson of the Student Assistance Team (SAT). The SAT is a multidisciplinary group charged with identifying modifications and/or classroom interventions which may assist students experiencing difficulties at school.

The population specifically involved in this practicum project were six regular education teachers in grades four and five, three special education teachers serving grades four, five and six, and three special education instructional aides.

The writer is a special education teacher with a caseload of 26, fourth and fifth grade students with mild to moderate special needs. The students had diverse needs including learning disabilities, behavioral/ emotional needs, and developmental delays. The writer worked with six fourth and fifth grade teachers and was charged with managing the program and providing direct services to students. Services were to be provided in the regular education classroom as much as possible in keeping with the school system philosophy of inclusion. In this endeavor, two special education aides worked under the direction and supervision of the writer.

The writer has 18 years of experience instructing special students having taught learning disabled, developmentally delayed, behaviorally and emotionally handicapped students primarily in public school settings. The writer's undergraduate degree is in special education with training in learning disabilities, developmental delays, and emotional handicaps. The writer holds a master's degree in education technology with a specialization in special education. The writer is currently concluding doctoral studies, having recently completed human development, educational leadership, and program evaluation components as well as research pertaining to the inclusion of special education students.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Adolescence is a time of unprecedented change. During this period, roughly between the ages of 10 and 15, the body is undergoing the most dramatic period of growth since infancy. Physical development and growth are thrown into high gear during this period as students begin the metamorphosis into adulthood. The physical changes alone challenge most students.

Spurred by physical maturation, the beginnings of adult sexuality bring emotional and social challenges to the forefront placing many young people on what seems like an emotional roller coaster. Changes in family structures can make the peaks higher and the valleys lower on the roller coaster. This wild ride is further complicated by a school transition, the transition to middle school or junior high. The school transition during early adolescence can be the straw that breaks the camel's back, the challenge that causes the roller coaster car to fly off the track. As such, there is an urgent need to better characterize and anticipate the needs of early adolescent students to facilitate smooth transitions during this critical developmental stage.

In the writer's work setting, students make the transition to middle school at the start of sixth grade. Students from four elementary schools join forces at a single middle school to continue their educational journey through grade eight. With normal developmental hurdles and the changes in families seen throughout our society, the emotional needs of these students were increasingly challenging.

Additionally, in the writer's work setting, the population in the middle school was becoming more diverse as special education students were increasingly integrated into regular classrooms for instruction. This relatively new service delivery plan represented a dramatic shift from traditional pull-out special education services. The program challenges of this student population were immense. Efforts to deal with these challenges were constrained by the severely limited financial and staff resources of the school system.

Nonetheless, there was a growing awareness of the problems faced by students in school transitions. There was a new system-wide policy in the writer's work setting to begin to address these serious needs. The new policy required each school to provide orientation activities for all students in grades one through five. This policy reflected an awareness of the need to assist students through school transitions in general, not just those students transitioning to the middle school. There was clearly a need to address the many requirements of students and families as students negotiated school transitions.

The problem in the writer's work setting was a serious one with profound impact on students. In brief, effectively characterizing the skills and anticipating the needs of elementary students as they transitioned from grade to grade and school to school was difficult, making planning to ensure adequate resources challenging. This problem needed to be resolved.

Problem Documentation

Evidence of the problem in the writer's work setting was supported by an informal survey, school records and policy, staff and parent comments, and observation.

The records passed on from grade to grade and school to school to characterize student skills in the writer's work setting included: standardized test scores, report cards, a checklist notation of Chapter 1, remedial reading, or counseling services, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for special education students only, notation of reading text used, and perhaps a very brief comment or numerical rating of general academic performance level. The writer conducted an informal survey to assess teacher perception of the effectiveness of these records in characterizing the skills and needs of students prior to implementation.

The very brief opinionnaire (see Appendix A) designed by the writer for this investigation, included six incomplete statements. Three response choices were given to complete each statement in multiple choice format. Survey respondents had only to circle the letter which best reflected their opinion. Twelve staff members participated in the survey including staff members in administration, guidance, regular education and special education in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. On statement one of the informal survey of 12 staff members, 8 teachers indicated that student records passed from grade to grade provided little insight into actual student needs including academic strengths and weaknesses.

In accordance with special education regulations, the writer scheduled and chaired team meetings to review the progress of special education students and write new IEPs. In conferences with parents of special education students, 12 of 14 parents indicated concern regarding transitions to the middle school. Comments from parents such as, "I'm scared of him going up there," were common, and reflected widespread concern regarding the transition to middle school.

Prior to implementation, there was an orientation for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school coordinated by middle school guidance staff members. The orientation included a walk through sixth grade classrooms, brief welcome comments from the administration and guidance staff, lunch in the cafeteria, and a question and answer period. Unfortunately, according to comments from five of five staff members in attendance, the orientation program for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school provided little help to students. While the activities scheduled would seem to provide a good overall orientation, in actual fact the brevity of each segment limited the effectiveness. The entire orientation lasted two hours including time to walk back and forth to the middle school.

Additional evidence of the problem existed. There was no written plan to assist in student transitions at the writer's school, despite a recently adopted policy to institute a system-wide "Moving-On Day" for orientation in grades one through five. This policy was revealed to staff in the writer's building at a faculty meeting. The policy statement directed to principals from the assistant superintendent's office, was duplicated and distributed to staff at the faculty meeting. The principal diplomatically expressed his deep reservations about the directive, noting the last Friday of the school year as the expected implementation date.

Staff comments in response to announcement of the new "Moving-On Day" policy were observed to be primarily negative. The staff reluctantly planned to conduct a 30 minute orientation on the specified day as required.

As further documentation of the problem, the writer noted that two staff members had consulted members of the executive board of the teachers' association with concerns regarding the process used to plan for special education students transitioning to new grades, and the proper means to ensure adequate resources for same. This inquiry, a preliminary step to the filing of a formal grievance, was reflective of grave concern on the part of regular education teachers. They recognized that special education staff resources were severely strained, and anticipated the need for union assistance to secure adequate resources for special students placed in their classrooms.

The problem was clearly evidenced in the writer's work setting. Staff and parents alike were expressing concern over school transitions. Existing plans for orientation activities to facilitate school transitions were inadequate or nonexistent.

Causative Analysis

It is the writer's belief that there were three general causes of the problem. First, there were procedural causes of the problem. The traditional standardized tests, report cards, IEPs, checklists noting special services and texts, and very brief comments included in student records did not effectively characterize student performance levels. Student skills and needs were not effectively reflected in the records used for this purpose. The assessment procedures and/or methods were ineffective.

Similarly, orientation procedures were deficient. The current orientation program for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school was very brief and provided only a cursory introduction to the building with little or no opportunity to interact with sixth grade staff members. Without appropriate and engaging orientation activities, students were not prepared for their school transition.

Alarmingly, there was no comprehensive process by which staff members at different grade levels formally collaborated, exchanged information, designed class lists, and shared in the decisions to plan smooth transitions for students. This procedural deficit was no doubt impacting staff morale and student progress.

Second, the writer noted people or attitudinal causes of the problem. Parents often fear the transition to middle school on the basis of rumors or misconceptions, lacking adequate information about services and programs available there. Misinformation or the lack of information was shaping negative attitudes which were affecting student progress in the transition.

As previously noted, adolescence is a time of great change. The physical and emotional turbulence associated with the developmental stage of early adolescence was causing fear and anxiety on the part of students contributing to difficulties in school transitions.

Another attitudinal cause of the problem had to do with staff. Staff members at the building level did not share in the decision and planning of a system-wide "Moving-On Day" and some were reluctant to support decisions they felt were dictated.

Third, there were also training causes of the problem. There had been no training offered to staff members in alternative assessment methods. Most staff members in the writer's building were veteran teachers with years of experience. While experience is normally considered an asset, in this instance it was a deficit. Few teachers on this staff had participated in any training in alternative assessment practices.

Compounding the assessment training issue, staff members in the writer's work setting often expressed feeling overburdened by the demands of many special students. Many felt unprepared to service them in the regular classroom since no formal training in special needs had been offered. The lack of specific training in methods appropriate for particular exceptionalities was yet another cause of transition problems.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Problems pertaining to educational transitions in early adolescence are cited in the research. Many authors are investigating the problems associated with transitions in this pivotal period in students' lives. The problems experienced in the writer's work setting are not unique. Resolution could positively impact countless students.

In a review of the literature, the central question is, what happens to early adolescents as they transition from grade to grade and school to school? Answering this question and proposing solutions was the purpose of The Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, convened by the Carnegie Corporation in the late 1980s. The report of this prestigious group of child advocates painted a dismal picture and presented challenges to educators and the community at large which remain challenges today.

According to this landmark report (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), "as young adolescents move from elementary to middle or junior high schools, their involvement with learning diminishes and their rate of alienation, drug abuse, absenteeism, and dropping out begin to rise" (p. 32). A major concurrent investigation undertaken by the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools reinforced the fact that early adolescents are at risk for failure (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Other investigators continue to document the problems involved in school transitions and the need for interventions to ensure the success of these young people.

In a review of additional literature regarding early adolescence, Harter, Whitesell, and Kowalski (1992) as well as Marsh (1989), and Schunk (1991), note that students' self-perception of academic competence changed, most often declining, at the transition to middle school contributing in turn to a decline in academic motivation.

Marsh (1989) notes that self-concept is multifaceted and can be effectively analyzed in terms of individual dimensions. Overall self-concept may be examined as academic and nonacademic. The academic dimension may be further operationalized by subject area, grade, and sex. His study and extensive review of the literature on self-concept indicate a curvilinear decline in self-concept during early preadolescence and early adolescence (approximately grades one to three and three to six respectively) leveling off through middle adolescence, followed by an increase in self-concept developing through adulthood. While the author cautions that the bottoming out of self-concept is not necessarily caused by the school transition, it is highly correlated to the transition period. As such, implications for teachers should be considered in planning for facilitating student progress.

Schunk (1991) makes the distinction between self-efficacy and self-concept. Though related constructs, self-efficacy relates more directly to the student's perception of ability to perform tasks, comprising a component of the more global self-concept. The link between self-efficacy and academic motivation and achievement is demonstrated in Schunk's work. Students who perceived themselves as capable, and experienced feedback reinforcing that perception persisted longer in academic tasks and demonstrated greater achievement. As many early adolescents enter the school transition period with limited feelings of competence, many are doomed to failure. The success or failure that early adolescents experience during critical transition periods must be an essential factor in the design and evaluation of instruction and assessment.

Harter, Whitesell, and Kowalski (1992) conducted two longitudinal studies designed to examine student responses to educational transitions. They investigated the relationship between student perceptions of academic competence, affect, anxiety, and motivation during school transitions in early adolescence. They note that students' self-perception of academic competence changed at the transition to middle school. Perception of academic competence correlated positively with both academic motivation and general affect toward school. Declining perceptions of academic competence were related to a trend toward extrinsic motivation noted in the middle school environment. Additionally, students' anxiety was negatively correlated with the perception of competence. It was observed that a decline in feelings of competence was associated with an increase in anxiety levels.

The combined results demonstrate that the transition period is a volatile time for students, particularly students who approach the transition with negative perceptions of academic competence. Many of these students experience decreased feelings of competence, increased anxiety, and declines in motivation and engagement at school. Clearly, the problems associated with school transitions are significant for early adolescents and the professionals charged with managing their education.

In related studies, Simmons and Blyth (1987) reinforce that adolescents already experiencing school difficulties are particularly vulnerable in transitions. Holmes (1987) describes the academic stress points for students citing fourth grade and junior high school as presenting significant challenges for students. In fourth grade students are first faced with the challenge of reading to learn. Prior to this point, student responsibility is learning to read. This shift in focus can be troublesome for students particularly those experiencing any learning difficulties.

Similarly, there is a great challenge for students as they transition to junior high. The challenge inherent here is learning to organize learning. Students are faced with much more responsibility to work independently on complex tasks. Learning disabled students often do not have the experience in breaking down complex learning tasks and can be at risk for failure during this period. The early adolescent transition period for exceptional students may be improved with careful consideration of instruction, assessment, and support.

Support in all areas is critical. Many researchers including Eccles et al. (1989) and Eccles et al. (1993) note a decline in self-esteem at the transition to middle school. These authors note the mean level of early adolescents' self esteem, measured four times over a two year period, was lowest immediately after the school transition. This problem cannot go unaddressed if early adolescents are to be successful.

Typical of the difficulties associated with school transitions, many prominent authors note student perception of math ability tends to fall dramatically at the transition to middle school (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989a; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Students' self-perception of math ability positively correlates to perception of teacher support, value of mathematics, and math achievement (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989b). In this study, students transitioning from elementary teachers which they perceived to be highly supportive, to junior high teachers they felt were less supportive, showed a dramatic drop in achievement and valuing of math. Again, the perception of support in early adolescence is crucial to success.

Problems associated with school transitions include assessment. There is a widespread call for authentic assessments (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991; Wolf, LeMahieu, & Eresh, 1992; Worthen, 1993) which may contribute to a better estimation of transitioning students' strengths and weaknesses. According to LeMahieu, Eresh, and Wallace (1992, p. 8), "even a cursory review of educational headlines in America in recent years reveals a high level of dissatisfaction with the current means of assessing student progress."

The difficulty with traditional tests is their irrelevance to practical skills and poor illustration of how a child is learning (Grindler & Stratton, 1992; Hanson, 1992; Johnston, 1992; McGuire, 1992). If indeed our purpose in assessment is to improve instruction, to facilitate student learning, we must find better assessment methods. According to Flood and Lapp (1989), "a single score, whether it is a course grade or a percentile score from a norm referenced test, almost always fails to accurately report students' overall progress" (p. 509). The utilization of standardized test scores and report card grades fails to portray the skill levels and needs of transitioning students.

The Department of Education in Vermont undertook a major project to revitalize the assessments utilized throughout the state beginning in 1990. This major reassessment of assessment practices was response to realization that standardized tests were not accurately assessing the educational outcomes valued by citizens in Vermont (Forseth, 1992). Much broader assessments were needed to gauge the effectiveness of instruction in writing and mathematical problem solving to ensure student growth in these crucial areas of development.

Over the last decade there have been notable shifts in curriculum and instruction. There has been a trend toward whole language instruction with authentic children's literature as the central medium for instruction rather than basal readers. There has been a trend toward process writing, shifting away from stressing the mechanics of writing and spelling, emphasizing communication skill, instead. There has been a shift toward real problem solving in science and math using manipulatives, tools, and authentic problems; a shift away from rote computation and theoretical knowledge mastery. With these shifts in curriculum comes the need to restructure and align assessment.

Effective methods for assessing student growth which reflect new curricular materials and instructional methods are needed (Adams & Hamm, 1992; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

A number of causes are cited in the literature, of problems associated with transitions. Eccles and Midgley (1989) and other researchers (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991) purport that changes in educational environments contribute to the difficulties experienced by many students as they transition to middle grade schools. These studies suggest that academic performance, school attachment, and motivation are impacted by changes in the school environment.

Eccles, Lord and Midgley (1991) and others (Mack, 1992) note little difference in the junior high schools and the middle schools they studied. While there is a notable difference in philosophy between theoretical middle schools and junior high schools, these authors found few differences in actual practice. Both school structures exhibited a similar organizational scheme.

Typically, junior high schools and middle schools are larger and more impersonal than elementary schools serving greater numbers of students (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). They are often departmentalized for instruction. Ability grouping or tracking is frequently still used. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on teacher control, discipline, whole-class tasks, lower level cognitive skills, and social comparison (Cheek, 1992). These typical structures and practices contribute to a classroom environment and school climate quite different from those typically experienced by young students.

The decline in achievement frequently experienced by early adolescents may be related to elements of support present or absent in the classroom environment (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989b) after the school transition. Students report less of a personal connection with staff after the transition from elementary schools. This change in the quality of interpersonal relationship with teachers may contribute to decreased academic motivation and achievement.

Sometimes referred to as a period of storm and stress, the developmental stage of adolescence presents challenges for many young people. Larsen and Ham (1993) maintain that the biological, emotional, and social changes inherent in the developmental stage of adolescence contribute to problems associated with the middle school transition. In their study involving 483 adolescents, Larsen and Ham found that early adolescents experience more negative life events and have a stronger emotional response to these events than do preadolescents. Similarly, Butte (1993) and others (Hilliard, 1992) report adolescents are experiencing more psychological stresses than ever before.

Eccles, Lord and Midgley (1991) echo this concern noting the developmental needs of adolescents are apparently mismatched with the structures and practices typical in middle grade schools. Just as adolescents seek autonomy, the school emphasizes control. Just as adolescents seek intellectual challenges, the school emphasizes lower level cognitive strategies. At a time when close personal relationships are essential, social networks are disrupted (Berndt, 1987) and teachers distance themselves. This mismatch with student developmental needs is associated with the marked decline in motivation demonstrated by many early adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993).

The powerful, preconceived *notions, and responses of teachers* may be a cause of some of the difficulties experienced by transitioning students. Teacher perception (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1988, 1989b; Wilczenski, 1992) limits the potential progress of students if teachers are acting on stereotypes of unruly, difficult adolescents. There is a self-fulfilling prophecy which limits the progress of students when the teacher's perception is limited and negative. Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1988), in the Transitions in Early Adolescence project in the Detroit area, found that "post transition teachers trust students less, believe more strongly in controlling and disciplining students, and have a weaker sense of teaching efficacy than do pretransition teachers" (p. 543). These authors suggest that stereotypic views of junior high students negatively impact their teachers' beliefs and behaviors.

In a subsequent study (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989a), teacher efficacy was positively correlated to student self- and task-related beliefs regarding mathematics competency. Students who transitioned from an elementary teacher with high efficacy, to a junior high teacher with low efficacy, demonstrated low expectancy levels, low perceived performance levels, and high task difficulty perceptions. Essentially, these students responded to their teachers' feelings of low efficacy, by adopting the same limited viewpoint regarding their own capabilities. Low ability students were particularly vulnerable to the negative impact of teacher efficacy. The implications of this finding are profound for educational leaders.

Gender stereotyping (Hill & Lynch, 1983) may also cause problems at this critical period in students' lives. In the early adolescent period, personal identification and social development are occurring. Gender-role intensification, or adoption of stereotypic gender roles, may account for the predictable differences in self-concept of ability in math noted by Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, and Midgley (1991). These authors note that after the transition to middle grades, while boys and girls liked math equally, girls' self-concept of math ability was lower. The pervasive societal image presented for boys and girls may yet be effecting their development.

In view of all that is known about difficulties associated with transitions, a number of school reforms seem basic, but reform efforts are often thwarted. There are a number of factors that make wholesale assessment reform difficult. Portfolio assessment involves more time than simple multiple choice tests. The man hours involved in a complex assessment can make it an expensive choice (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991; Johnston, 1992; Mabry, 1992). Teacher training is required for effective use of portfolios for assessment purposes (Forseth, 1992; Mathews, 1990).

A switch to alternative assessments requires change on the part of teachers and support on the part of administrators, and change is always difficult in educational institutions (Mathews, 1990). Without sufficient support and training, teachers can consciously or unconsciously sabotage forays into alternative assessments not recognizing the connection to improved instruction, but simply reacting to the idea of additional classroom burdens under pressure to cover the existing curriculum (Hanson, 1992; Moses, 1992). The difficulties associated with assessment reform simply compound the difficulties experienced by students as they transition during this critical stage in their lives.

Several domains were incorporated into this search of the literature including regular education, special education, sociology, and psychology. The literature reviewed supported the writer's causative analysis of the problem and evidenced the widespread nature and seriousness of this problem.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and expectations were projected for this practicum. The goal of the writer was that early adolescent students would experience greater success in periods of school transition. The expectation of the writer was that students moving from fourth to fifth grade and from fifth grade to the middle school environment, as well as students transitioning from special education settings to regular education classrooms, would experience smoother transitions.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum. After implementation, it was expected that the situation in the writer's work setting would look quite different. There were several expected outcomes which would document change. First, receiving teachers would have substantial assessment data from a variety of sources to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of diverse students.

Second, staff members would indicate a perception of improved insight into students' skills and needs with the inclusion of additional information in the records.

Third, parents of special education students would express more confidence regarding the transition to the middle school.

Fourth, staff members would provide positive feedback indicating an improved plan for transitioning fifth graders to the middle school.

Fifth, staff members would provide positive feedback indicating support for planned orientation activities.

Sixth, staff members would provide positive feedback indicating approval and support for "Moving-On Day" plans.

Seventh, teachers at all levels in the writer's building would acknowledge increased involvement and participation in a collaborative planning process designed to arrange a successful transition of all students. A more detailed discussion of these objectives follows.

Measurement of Outcomes

It was the writer's intent to effect a positive change in the work setting. As such, it was essential to assess progress both during and after implementation. Measurement of the following outcomes provides data with which to evaluate the success of interventions selected as solution strategies.

After implementation, records passed on in the cumulative record folder for all transitioning fourth and fifth grade special education students would include a summary of performance assessments, such as reading and writing portfolios. This summary would include a list of performance assessments utilized with the student, organized by subject area. A brief narrative would be included to summarize pertinent information gleaned from these assessments regarding the student's strengths and weaknesses. This narrative would be based on currently available scope and sequence of skills listed in the school system curriculum guides, by grade level, for each academic subject. Work samples and other materials beneficial to enhance the understanding of student performance levels, would be attached to the summary statement as appropriate.

In addition, a one-half page summary of the information included in the student's IEP would be included in each fourth and fifth grade special education student's cumulative record folder. This summary shall include: student name, parent or guardian name, minutes of service delivery per week, IEP review date, service prototype, a statement regarding preferred learning style, strengths, weaknesses, current performance levels cited, a very brief summary of goals and objectives, testing/classroom modifications, behavior/discipline issues, and medical issues.

The completion and inclusion into cumulative record folders of these two student summaries, for each special education student in the fourth and fifth grade, would constitute successful completion of this expected outcome. The documentation of similar information regarding performance assessments for regular education students would indicate exemplary improvement in the effective utilization of alternative assessment to characterize student strengths and weaknesses.

An informal survey of 10 staff members involved in this investigation would be conducted by the writer at the close of the implementation period. A survey instrument of this type was selected to evaluate progress because it provided a uniform means of assessing teacher perception in a consistent, time-effective manner. It was projected that eight or more respondents would indicate a perception of improved insight into students' skills and needs with the inclusion of additional information into the student records. This perception would be indicated by selecting choice "b" or "a" on the following survey statement: (see Appendix B)

> In my opinion, the inclusion of performance assessment and IEP summaries in student cumulative records-
>
> a. significantly improves my understanding of student skills and needs
> b. somewhat improves my understanding of student skills and needs
> c. provides little additional insight into student skills and needs.

This statement would comprise item one on the informal staff survey which would be administered post implementation. Selection of choice "a" or "b" by at least eight staff members involved in the project would constitute successful achievement of this outcome. In the event that eight or more staff members choose item "a", this result would indicate exemplary success in the objective to document improved insight into students' skills and needs on the part of staff. Survey results would be tallied and reported in table format in the final report of the investigation.

Further evidence of a change in the writer's work setting would be documented in notes taken during parent conferences. In conferences with eight parents of special education students during the implementation period, three or less would spontaneously express concern regarding transition to the middle school. This decline in statements of concern, expressed by a parent in any spontaneous comments to team members immediately before, during, or immediately after the conference, would constitute successful achievement of this objective. Exemplary achievement would be evidenced by the total absence of any statements indicating concern over the transition. Statements would be recorded verbatim in the meeting notes of the writer. These notes and their inclusion in the final report would document any change pertaining to this outcome without compromising objectivity.

After reviewing a proposal for orientation activities for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school, 8 of 10 fifth and sixth grade staff members surveyed would provide feedback indicating an improved plan. This feedback would be documented in response to the statement from the informal staff survey which follows: (see Appendix B)

> In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school-
>
> a. represents a significant improvement
> b. somewhat improves the former orientation
> c. represents little improvement over past activities.

Similar to results reported for item one, responses would be tallied and reported in table format in a final report of the project. Eight of 10 staff responses reflecting either choice "a" or "b", would demonstrate successful achievement on this objective. In the event that eight or more respondents select choice "a", noting significant improvement in orientation plans, the outcome achievement would be considered exemplary.

Still further documentation of change would be possible in a brief survey of twelve staff members involved in initiatives in the writer's school. These staff members would include, administrators, guidance, and fourth and fifth grade staff members. After reviewing a proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade, 10 of 12 staff members involved with the transitioning students would provide positive feedback on a teacher opinionnaire indicating support. The level of support would be evidenced in responses to the following question: (see Appendix C)

> In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade this year- .
>
> a. represents a significant improvement
> b. somewhat improves the former orientation
> c. represents little improvement over past activities.

Similar to reporting for other items, responses would be tallied and reported in table format at the close of the investigation. Ten of 12 staff responses reflecting either choice "a" or "b", would demonstrate successful achievement on this objective. In the event that eight or more respondents select choice "a", noting significant improvement in orientation plans, the outcome achievement would be considered exemplary.

In a full faculty meeting just prior to the close of the implementation period, a comprehensive plan for school-wide orientation activities for "Moving-On Day" would be reviewed. Fifteen of 20 staff members would provide positive feedback indicating approval and support of the plan in an informal teacher survey administered at the meeting. Evidence of change would be documented in staff responses to the following statement: (see Appendix D)

> In my opinion, the orientation activities planned for "Moving-On Day" this year represent-
>
> a. significant improvement. I heartily approve and support the plan as presented.
> b. notable improvement. I approve and support the plan as presented.

c. little improvement. I will support the decision of the staff regarding this plan.

The final evidence of change would be documented similarly in an informal survey of staff. At the full faculty meeting cited above, 15 of 20 teachers at all levels in the writer's building would acknowledge the new plan calls for increased involvement and participation in a collaborative planning process designed to arrange a successful transition of all students. This would be evidenced by response to the following survey statement:

> In my opinion, the planning process outlined to arrange for successful transition for students, provides opportunities for-
>
> a. significant increases in staff involvement and participation
> b. moderate increases in staff involvement and participation
> c. little increase in staff involvement and participation.

As with previous survey items, responses to these two statements would be recorded, tabulated, and reported in table format. Fifteen of 20 staff responses indicating choice "a" or "b" for each statement, would denote successful achievement of the objective. Fifteen or more selections of choice "a", would provide evidence of exemplary achievement.

As described in this implementation plan, there was the potential to document success on seven distinct objectives designed to facilitate smooth school transitions for early adolescents. Successful achievement of at least five of the individual objectives would indicate overall success of the project as a whole. Specific solution strategies to accomplish this end are discussed in Chapter IV of this document.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem in the writer's work setting was that the records used to characterize the skills and anticipate the needs of diverse, elementary students in transition, did not provide receiving teachers an effective assessment of current performance levels. Furthermore, there was inadequate or nonexistent planning to facilitate student transitions from grade to grade, elementary school to middle school, and from special education to regular education, to ensure adequate resources.

In a review of the literature, a number of authors suggest solutions strategies. The report of The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) makes eight global recommendations to address the needs of early adolescents: create a community of learning, teach a core of common knowledge, ensure success for all students, empower teachers and administrators, prepare teachers for the middle grades, improve academic performance through better health and fitness, reengage families, and connect schools with communities. This comprehensive list is expanded upon in the work of many others. Many specific solutions to the problems associated with school transitions in early adolescence are cited in the literature.

A number of authors suggest orientation programs for students to ease difficulties in school transitions (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). Case (1989) describes an orientation program for fifth graders designed to reduce the fears and answer students' questions about middle school. In this program, fifth grade students are individually paired up with host sixth graders for a full day of orientation. The fifth graders shadow the sixth graders for one full day to experience firsthand what the middle school is like. This visitation day is supplemented by visits from guidance counselors and administrators and a parent orientation program. Manning (1992) emphasizes the importance of communication with parents as a part of comprehensive transition programming suggesting topics including: adolescent development, adolescent behavior, and essentials of middle school philosophy and practice. Information on these topics could contribute to increased understanding of students in transition.

Glant (1989) is the principal of a transition school for fourth and fifth graders, a school specifically focused on preparing students for middle school. The students in her school participate in a similar comprehensive orientation program which includes extensive previsitation planning, parent involvement, and opportunities for students to explore the new school and meet future teachers. These authors report that orientation programs have reduced anxiety on the part of students and parents and contributed to a smooth transition.

Some authors suggest approaching the problems associated with school transitions from a holistic perspective (Hilliard, 1992; Uebbing & Cooper, 1992). In this light, school difficulties are seen as highly interrelated to the overall psychological health of the student. proceeding from this premise, interventions such as counseling can be beneficial for early adolescents as they provide an avenue to boost self-esteem and address the overall mental health of the student (Butte, 1993; Gerler, Drew, & Mohr, 1990; Wood & Beale, 1991). Gerler and Herndon (1993) studied the effect of multimodal group counseling with early adolescents and maintain that counseling is a viable solution strategy to assist students through transitions. They assessed the effect of 10 group counseling sessions on students in grades six through eight. Topics in the Succeeding in School guidance unit included: characteristics of successful people, listening skills, asking for help, responsibility, and cooperation. Results from this study indicate after participating in the counseling program, students demonstrated improved awareness of how to succeed in school. Butte (1993) concurs, suggesting that adolescent stress can be addressed in the classroom by means of specific instruction in stress reduction techniques and curriculum adjustments which allow students to examine, discuss, and explore strategies to handle the many psychological stresses they face.

Maehr and Midgley (1991) call on educational leaders to take the initiative to address deficits and mismatches in the school environment similar to those reforms suggested by Ames and Archer (1988) and Ames (1992) for restructuring the classroom environment to enhance student motivation. They suggest collaborative planning to restructure schools and classrooms to provide a more conducive psychological environment for students focusing on relevant learning tasks. Evaluating assessment practices should be included in reform efforts. These authors call for a move from traditional assessments to assessments which increase students' sense of competence and self efficacy, increase an awareness of unique talents, and provide opportunities to assess progress toward goals they have set. Traditional tests provide an ineffective medium for this type of assessment as they stress the recall of factual material and information (LeMahieu, Eresh, & Wallace, 1992) rather than the application of learning.

Teacher collaboration and planning is noted by other authors (Adamson, Cox, & Schuller, 1989; Skrtic, 1991) an an effective means to assist special education students. These students face additional academic and social challenges as they undergo the transition into the regular classroom concurrently with the transition to middle school. These additional challenges compound the difficulties experienced during school transitions by many early adolescents.

There are a number of difficulties involved in the integration of special students into the regular classroom. The roles and responsibilities of regular education and special education staff members must be defined to facilitate the progress of special students in their additional transition becoming active participants in the regular education classroom. Gallagher (1992) suggests regular, collaborative planning time among staff members is essential to assist in the integration of special education students, a prerequisite to their successful transition from grade to grade and school to school.

In a comprehensive list, Wood and Beale (1991) suggest in-service programs, pre-placement conferences, increased communication, parent conferencing, and fostering teamwork to assist special education students in school transitions. In-service programs can contribute to increased understanding of these unique students, particularly those students with low-incidence exceptionalities. Understanding is the foundation of acceptance for these students and the acceptance level of staff members is often mirrored in their students.

Wood and Beale further note that modifications in curriculum noted in a special education student's IEP may ease student transitions. Nientimp and Cole (1992) and Roberts and Zubrick (1992) suggest training in specific social skills should be included in special education students' IEPs to teach them more appropriate school behaviors. Social strategy instruction may contribute to decreased social isolation which may compound an already difficult school transition.

The national New Standards Project, California Assessment Program, and California Assessment Collaborative illustrate the national, state, regional, and local initiatives currently in progress throughout the United States to reevaluate assessment practices (Carriedo, 1992).

Johnston (1992) calls for more authentic assessments which are theory-based and self-referenced and cautions against the ploys of major publishers to appease those calling for alternative assessments with newly-packaged, disguised, traditional measures. Biggs (1992) and Reyes (1992) note that authentic assessments are particularly necessary to fairly assess the abilities and needs of culturally or linguistically different students. As student populations become more diverse, reflecting a change in societal demographics as well as the integration of special education students, the need for authentic assessments becomes more and more urgent.

Several authors cite performance assessments as a solution to current deficits in assessment practices (Berliner, 1992; Carriedo, 1992). Moses (1992) clarifies the distinction between generic alternative assessments, which by definition can essentially be anything, and true performance assessments. He suggests that educators design performance assessment instruments by first determining tasks that would be a good predictor of future success in the real world and then specifying standards which would demonstrate quality performance in the achievement of that task. The clear linkage between curriculum, instruction, and assessment is essential in the design and implementation of performance assessments. Optimally, "high quality assessments can enhance student growth and achievement" (Moses, 1992, p.18).

The great potential of performance assessments are described by many authors. While perhaps underutilized at the present time, performance assessments are not new phenomenon. Mabry (1992) studied an alternative assessment program that was established at an alternative high school in Wisconsin some 20 years ago. She notes the Rite of Passage Experience (ROPE) assessment process at Walden III High School has included performance assessments, requiring practical application of learning, and portfolio assessments in writing skills, for 20 years.

A number of portfolio projects are described in recent journal articles providing testament to their use as a solution to assessment problems. Portfolios can provide a tangible record of student progress over time enlightening parents and teachers (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Flood & Lapp, 1989). Their systematic use can contribute to improved instruction, increased collaboration, and parent involvement (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

LeMahieu, Eresh, and Wallace (1992) report the results of the PROPEL Project undertaken in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Public

Schools. This comprehensive alternative assessment project utilized student portfolios in writing, visual arts, and music as the basis for a public accounting of the effectiveness of instruction in the schools. Student writing portfolios included work samples over a period of time, selected according to a specific set of criteria. Students selected "a satisfying piece, an unsatisfying piece, an entire biography of a work, a free pick, and a 'negotiated free pick' chosen in interaction with the classroom teacher" (p. 11) for inclusion in the portfolio. Rough drafts, feedback from peers and teachers, and student reflections were also included.

At the close of the school year, a random stratified sample of student portfolios were selected for assessment purposes. Portfolios were rated using a numeric scale on three major dimensions: student accomplishment in writing, use of resources, processes, and strategies for writing, and the engagement, growth and development demonstrated as a writer. The final check of this assessment process was the utilization of an independent audit team which evaluated the process and standards involved. As described, the PROPEL Project illustrates the potential of using writing portfolios as a reliable and valid alternative to traditional assessments.

Forseth (1992) cites the statewide portfolio assessment project in Vermont as she describes the potential benefits to students using this approach. After an investigation into assessments, Vermont designed and implemented a portfolio assessment process for fourth and eighth graders throughout the state in writing and math ability. This program necessitated teacher training in instructional techniques and assessment procedures. Samples of students' best work were collected over time and included in portfolios.

A representative sample of student portfolios were examined and rated according to a set of specific criteria designed to address growth in desired educational outcomes. Evaluation criteria for math portfolios included: "understanding the task, applying the strategy, making decisions, verifying the solution, making connections, using rich mathematics language, and using effective mathematical representation" (p.26). The predetermined criteria set for portfolio assessment, fostered the development of both problem solving and communication skills on the part of students and teachers. This represents a dramatic shift in instruction away from rote computation mastery toward more authentic assessment of students in Vermont.

While the initial results reported to date are certainly not without question (Eismeier, 1992) the Vermont Portfolio Project for Writing and Mathematics demonstrates great potential and serves as a model for continued development in the area of alternative assessments. As a principal participating in the project, Eismeier (1992) suggests setting modest initial goals when adding portfolio assessment to an already extensive list of responsibilities for educators. He suggests that collecting students' work and creating the portfolio is an appropriate goal when beginning this process. He further notes regularly discussing the portfolios is also worthwhile as it stimulates ideas and collegiality. These basic initiatives comprise the foundation upon which to build more comprehensive assessment programs.

> Portfolios provide a powerful way to link learning with assessment. They can provide evidence of performance that goes far beyond factual knowledge and offers a clear

> and understandable picture of student achievement. They also provide opportunities for improved student self-image and self-worth. They can enhance self-esteem by having students take active roles in selecting and evaluating what they have learned.
> (Adams & Hamm, 1992, p. 105)

Clearly, this form of assessment could be most effective in portraying the skills and needs of early adolescents while encouraging their personal development and connection with peers and teachers in school (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991). This type of assessment can contribute to learning and developmental growth providing double benefit to students.

Other ideas were generated by the writer as solutions. Teacher training in student exceptionalities as well as alternative assessment methods could enhance awareness of student needs and contribute to more effective planning and transitions. The writer anticipated that the unusual needs of some students with low-incidence special needs (such as Tourette Syndrome) would present a special challenge in upcoming student transitions. Teacher training in these exceptionalities could ease the difficulties associated with the transition.

Collaborative planning regarding transitions from grade to grade and school to school could facilitate smoother transitions as staff members jointly addressed this issue. Team planning initiatives might contribute to increased ownership and understanding of the problems associated with transitions.

Increased communication with parents could help to address transition questions and concerns and help to ease anxieties. Specific training could be provided to students to address some of the common pitfalls associated with transitions. These steps could contribute to improved awareness and more realistic expectations on the part of parents and transitioning students.

Clearly, there were any number of possible solution strategies which could be combined to solve the problems in the writer's work setting, but several restrictions limited the final choice. Budget constraints in the writer's school prohibited the use of any solution strategy requiring funds. Additional staffing or training by outside vendors was not a possibility within the budget. Solution strategies which utilized existing resources in creative ways were deemed the most promising.

Description of Selected Solution

In designing a solution strategy, the writer sought to combine ideas gleaned from a review of the literature, tailoring them to the work setting, the time frame, and the staff involved. The writer was prepared to try several things in an effort to better characterize the skills, anticipate the needs, and plan for the successful transition of early adolescents.

The writer would utilize performance assessments in at least two academic areas in four fourth and fifth grade classrooms in conjunction with regular education staff members and the summarized results would be included in students' records.

The writer would offer training in performance assessment (see Appendix E for an outline of training goals and objectives) and portfolio assessment (see Appendix F) methods for interested staff members. Staff in the writer's building would be permitted to participate in one or both training modules as desired. A list of items suggested for inclusion in student portfolios is included in the appendices (see Appendix G) and would be presented in portfolio training sessions. Strategies for assessment using portfolios would also be included in the training.

The writer would utilize the school newsletter, letters and informational flyers, and speakers at parent meetings to provide more information to the parents of transitioning students to better inform them about support services and programs available.

The writer would facilitate the expansion and revision of the current orientation program for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school to provide a more comprehensive introduction to the staff, curriculum, and culture of the middle school. The writer would act as chairperson on a transition planning team, provide relevant materials, such as suggestions regarding orientation activities (see Appendix H) and information describing orientation activities in surrounding communities, and record the progress of the team.

The writer would facilitate a comprehensive planning process to prepare for student transitions within the building including provisions for shared responsibility and participation across grade levels and disciplines.

The writer would compile a brief summary of the research supporting the need for orientation activities and transition planning to be presented to staff at a faculty meeting, to provide insight into the origin of the system-wide policy for "Moving-On Day" (see Appendix I).

The writer would provide staff members a concise summary of the information included in the IEP of all fourth and fifth grade special education students and establish regular joint planning time for collaboration with regular education team members.

The writer would prepare an instructional module designed to support early adolescents facing school transitions including specific training in social awareness, conflict resolution, and study skills (see Appendix J).

This implementation plan was specifically tailored to address the problems associated with school transition in the writer's work setting. The writer would assume an active leadership role in implementation. This effort would positively impact the problem for several reasons. The principal and school system administrators were supportive of collaborative problem solving efforts and the integration of special education students. Staff members and parents were anxious for a better transition process recognizing the deficits in current procedures. Past practice indicated the greater the involvement and collaboration during problem solving, the more likely the investment and ownership of solution strategies.

Report of Action Taken

A specific timeline had been projected for the implementation period which tentatively structured the flow of activities. The planning phase was critical in a long-term project of this type which involved many component parts. As a part of the planning phase, the writer conducted a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to school transitions, adolescent development, current assessment practices, and special education initiatives. This background material provided a springboard of ideas on which to build and a wealth of information which was incorporated into staff development modules.

The implementation phase covered an eight month period. This amount of time was necessary due to the comprehensive nature of the solution strategies selected, many of which required team effort and sufficient "incubation time" to foster reflective collaboration. A chronological account of implementation activities follows.

As noted previously, collaboration was at the heart of the project and the collaboration began at the onset. In the initial step, a comprehensive outline of proposed initiatives was reviewed with the principal and the director of special education as well as the teachers and other staff members involved. Without their support, the efforts would have been fruitless. Additionally, the associate superintendent and superintendent were apprised of the planned activities. In all cases, the reaction was most positive and support was given along with permission to implement.

At the very beginning, it was clear that documentation of progress in the initiatives would involve careful record keeping. The writer began a journal during week one of implementation to provide a vehicle for anecdotal documentation. Journal entries were ongoing from that point. During all meetings, discussions, dates, times, and reactions were recorded on a brief "Meeting Notes" form designed by the writer. The meeting notes, journal, and various faculty and PTO notices collected over the implementation period provided the writer a running record of information pertinent to the initiatives. This information was essential in the documentation of change in the writer's work setting.

After an extensive review of the literature, it was the writer's position that effective use of performance assessments and portfolios would contribute to increased understanding of students' skills and needs. Incorporating this knowledge regarding specific students' skills and needs into team planning, might in turn facilitate smoother transitions for students from grade to grade within the elementary school and from elementary school to middle school. In an effort to increase staff awareness, the writer prepared and presented staff development modules on portfolio use and performance assessments. (Please see Appendices E and F for outlines of material presented.)

The writer had planned to provide this training to interested staff members after school, in eight sessions. A more appropriate vehicle for presentation was used which did not require staff members to extend their school day for the training.

Background material and specific suggestions were presented to staff in several ways. The writer utilized fourth and fifth grade team meetings to formally present written materials to colleagues and discuss potential uses. A packet of materials was provided to each fourth and fifth grade teacher during the training and is included in full in this document as Appendix L. Pertinent journal articles, sample scoring rubrics, and specific performance assessment activities were duplicated and shared with colleagues throughout the course of the implementation period. Videotapes and other resource materials on portfolios and performance assessment were made available during faculty meetings.

Additionally, the writer and several colleagues attended workshops on portfolio use and authentic assessments. Material from these workshops was presented by the writer and a colleague to the full building faculty during a curriculum development day. By utilizing team meeting times, faculty meetings, and curriculum development time, the material on portfolios and performance assessment was shared effectively without additional time commitments from already overburdened staff members.

The writer utilized performance assessments during classroom instruction with special education students and was available as a resource in regular classrooms throughout the implementation period. At the writer's suggestion, fifth grade students were introduced to the portfolio process by demonstration of real life portfolios and through direct instruction in appropriate vocabulary and goal setting. Students selected goals which were posted on their desk. Work samples were collected over the course of the term. At the close of each marking period, showcase portfolios were constructed using large sheets of construction paper. Teacher comments and feedback were included throughout the collection of work. The portfolios have been so well received that a spiral binding machine has been requested from PTO funds to improve portfolio bindings and contribute to their permanency.

The portfolios were used during fifth grade parent conferences as a vehicle for sharing information and during class for student discovery and academic tracking. Parent comments were solicited in written form and were included in the portfolios. Parental reactions were uniformly positive. The documentation of student growth over time was striking.

Fourth and fifth grade staff members involved in ongoing training regarding performance assessment and portfolio use, completed an evaluation form (see Appendix K) at the close of the implementation period. Results and feedback are included in Chapter V of this document.

The staff development component was designed to increase awareness of students' academic strengths and needs. Further knowledge of student specific issues was provided by the writer. In the inclusion model, special education students are integrated into regular classrooms as much as possible for instruction. For special education students to realize success, regular education staff members must be familiar with their learning style, strengths and needs. During the first week of school, the writer compiled a concise summary of the information recorded in each IEP for students in fourth and fifth grade. An example of the IEP summary format may be found in Appendix M.

A copy of the services summary for each special education student was provided to regular education teachers and itinerant specialists to familiarize them with specific needs and preferred approach for individual students. This summary in effect translates the cumbersome special education document into a quick reference sheet more readily utilized by teachers. A copy was placed in each student's cumulative record folder by the writer.

In an effort to facilitate the inclusion program, the writer also provided training to special education instructional aides and regular education staff members pertaining to learning styles and learning disabilities as well as Tourette's syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Delays. This training was provided during weekly consultation periods with the staff involved. The training was accomplished by model instruction and the use of print resource materials on low incidence exceptionalities and videotapes.

Special education students provide a real challenge in the regular classroom. Support services and instruction from special education staff must be well planned with regular education staff members for students to make a successful transition to the regular education realm. A collaborative planning schedule was established by the writer during the second week of school to facilitate cooperative efforts to integrate special education students into the regular classroom and facilitate the use of performance assessments.

Joint planning sessions of 40 minutes were held weekly with the grade five team. A scheduling conflict developed which made it impossible to meet one period weekly with all three fourth grade teachers. The writer was able to adjust the schedule to permit a concurrent planning period, once weekly with two fourth grade teachers and a separate planning period was established on a weekly basis with the final fourth grade staff member. While scheduling the collaborative planning periods was difficult, it was a priority of the writer seen as critical to cooperative efforts toward the successful transition of students. During the planning periods, the training on performance assessment and use of portfolios took place, materials and methods were routinely shared, and classroom modifications for special students were suggested.

Additional initiatives were undertaken to address special education issues. As previously noted, regular education staff members play a critical role in the successful transition of special education students to the regular education program. Knowledge of special education eligibility criteria and prereferral interventions might eliminate unnecessary or inappropriate referrals which tax the special education service delivery system. The writer addressed this issue by investigating the prereferral or Student Assistance Team (SAT) process, used in other schools within the school system; comparing and contrasting the process used in the writer's building.

The writer compiled a summary of the current special education eligibility criteria established by state and federal law and a description of the SAT process used within the building. Misinformation about these processes can hamper the integration of special education students impeding their progress during school transitions. This summarized material was reviewed with the building principal and special education director prior to presentation to staff members at a faculty meeting. Upon perusal, it was apparent that there was great variability in the prereferral process utilized at different schools in the system. In an effort to improve and refine the SAT process in the writer's building, increasing the involvement of regular education staff, the writer wrote a grant to secure staff development on this topic. Resolution of the grant application was pending at the time of this report.

The essential components in this initiative were not limited, though, to special education transitions. The transition to the middle school environment effects all fifth graders. Several initiatives were undertaken to facilitate this important student transition.

The writer had planned to meet with the middle school principal and guidance staff early in the implementation period to institute collaborative planning for a more comprehensive orientation for fifth grade students. Unfortunately, there were unexpected events which resulted in changes in the projected calendar plan.

Shortly after the practicum proposal was submitted, the middle school principal announced his retirement. A new principal did not come on board at this school for several months. Subsequently, the assistant principal accepted another position outside of the school system. The middle school guidance counselor was appointed as interim assistant principal until such time as permanent positions and plans were made. This dramatic change in administration at the middle school precipitated a roll-back in the scheduling of a transition planning initiative to allow for an orientation period of a new administrative team. Once contacted, though, the new middle school principal was very interested in collaborative planning and improving the quality of information available to parents of fifth grade students. In fact, he had an even more comprehensive planning initiative in mind.

The writer had proposed a cooperative planning effort to develop a more comprehensive student orientation for students transitioning to the middle school. Acting as a facilitator, the writer would work with fifth grade staff members from the writer's building and sixth grade staff members to devise a new orientation. In recognition of a system-wide need, the newly elected principal elected to gather input from fifth grade staff members system-wide to develop and/or refine existing orientation procedures. The writer acted as building facilitator in this effort.

The writer conducted an informal telephone survey of surrounding schools prior to these meetings and was able to share the orientation plans for middle schools in the area with the fifth grade team. Feedback indicated that most schools in the area conducted a brief visit to orient new middle school students. Many teachers contacted expressed a feeling that the orientation was inadequate.

The writer met with the fifth grade team in two sessions to compile suggestions for an expanded orientation. The writer scheduled a meeting with the middle school principal and assistant principal to participate in collaborative planning. The writer arranged for class coverage so that all staff members could provide input without staying after school. The writer prepared a written summary of the orientation suggestions from the building team which was given to middle school staff at the meeting (see Appendix N). The suggestions were well received and will be a component part of a new orientation procedure which is yet to be finalized by middle school staff.

After transition planning was discussed, the fifth grade team had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the programs at the middle school with the new principal and assistant principal. This updated information regarding new programs at the middle school could be shared informally by fifth grade team members at parent conferences and the spring open house and may contribute to improved perceptions of the middle school as a welcoming and child-centered learning environment.

The writer requested written descriptions of the programs which might be summarized to be shared with fifth grade parents. The middle school principal instead volunteered to attend the spring "Moving-On" evening and address parents of fifth graders directly. He also agreed to attend a spring PTO meeting and Special Education Parent Organization meeting to address transition issues, questions and any concerns about the middle school directly. The writer contacted respective chair persons and scheduled these visits.

The transition to the middle school is clearly an important event in students' lives. It was the writer's contention that increased awareness of students' strengths and needs, combined with a comprehensive orientation designed through collaborative planning and improved communication would facilitate a smooth transition for fifth graders and their families. Transition planning within the writer's building was also addressed.

All students face the annual challenge of a transition from grade to grade, from teacher to teacher. This issue was addressed within the writer's building by the development of a transition planning policy. To begin the process, the writer addressed the faculty describing the need for transition planning as noted in the professional literature. Volunteers interested in transition planning were solicited. A team of four staff members met to review the current planning process. The writer facilitated the planning initiative and acted as liaison to the principal.

It was noted that the transition planning was typically undertaken late in the school year often coinciding with special year-end activities and duties. It was further noted that the process used to place special education students was sometimes unilateral, made without sufficient input from regular education staff. This process may have contributed to diminished regular education "ownership" of special education students in their charge. A cooperative planning process was proposed which structured cross-disciplinary input and established an earlier timeline for the development of class lists. Input from the full faculty was requested by way of grade level teams before the final planning process was submitted to the building principal.

The last element of transition planning within the building dealt with orientation activities for the system-wide "Moving-On Day." The earlier time frame of the new transition planning policy afforded grade level teams more time to plan appropriate orientation activities for students. The writer requested the date for "Moving-On Day" from the superintendent's office and presented this information and the potential benefits of transition planning at a faculty meeting. Plans were developed subsequently at each grade level for "Moving-On Day" orientation activities. The writer compiled these plans and prepared a comprehensive summary for the building principal. The comprehensive plan was reviewed at a full faculty meeting so that all staff would be aware of activities planned at each grade level. The writer administered an informal survey to gather feedback at the faculty meeting.

To further support the transitions of early adolescents, the writer planned and prepared an instructional module to provide direct instruction which might facilitate a smooth transition for students. This mini-unit titled "Transition Pitfalls" was distributed to fourth and fifth grade team members complete with lesson plans and materials for small group work. The unit consists of 12 lessons which address the logistics in a large school, social awareness and self-esteem, effective study skills, and the basics of conflict resolution. The writer utilized maps and handbooks from the writer's school and the middle school to familiarize students with school layout and procedures. Role playing activities were included to address social awareness and conflict resolution. Homework notebooks and review formats from actual social studies texts were used to address study skills. All lessons are self-contained so they may be used as needed not necessarily in a sequence.

To complete the project and follow-up on initiatives, the writer gathered information on performance assessments used in the fourth and fifth grade classes and placed a summary statement in students' cumulative record folders. A checklist of student competencies based on performance assessments was used for this purpose. Additionally, the writer conducted an informal survey of staff members participating in the initiatives and completed a final report describing in detail the initiatives planned, implementation, and results.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The problem in the writer's work setting was serious, impacting many students. The records used to characterize the skills and anticipate the needs of diverse, elementary students in transition, did not provide receiving teachers an effective assessment of current performance levels. Furthermore, there was inadequate or nonexistent planning to facilitate student transitions from grade to grade, from elementary to middle school, and from special education to regular education, to ensure adequate resources. Students were negotiating challenging school transitions with little assistance.

The goal of the writer was that early adolescent students would experience greater success in periods of school transition. To accomplish this end, several solution strategies were utilized to facilitate school transitions from grade to grade and from special education to regular education programs. A major component of the solution selected focused on training initiatives so that teachers could better assess student performance levels and deal effectively in the classroom with special education needs. A second major component dealt with expanding collaborative planning opportunities so that teachers could work together, sharing their ideas and expertise, to facilitate school transitions for students.

The first expected outcome was that after implementation, receiving teachers would have substantial assessment data from a variety of sources to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of diverse students. This objective was successfully achieved.

By the close of the implementation period, two additional information sources were included in the cumulative record folders for all special education students in the fourth and fifth grades in the writer's building. As planned, the cumulative record folders for all transitioning fourth and fifth grade special education students now include a summary statement describing performance assessments in reading and writing portfolios. This summary, organized by subject area, contains a brief narrative describing the student's strengths and weaknesses. This is supplemented by a skills checklist based on currently available scope and sequence derived from the school system curriculum guides. Work samples and other materials beneficial to enhance the understanding of student performance levels, are attached to the summary statement as appropriate.

Due to the vast amount of paperwork involved, the regular education teachers in fourth and fifth grade opted not to summarize the performance assessment data and include it in students' cumulative records.

The second additional information source included in student cumulative records is a one-half page summary of the information included in the student's IEP (see Appendix M). This summary consists of: student name, parent or guardian name, minutes of service delivery per week, IEP review date, service prototype, a statement regarding preferred learning style, strengths, weaknesses, current performance levels, a very brief summary of goals and objectives, testing/classroom modifications, and any behavior/discipline and medical issues. It is the writer's sincere hope that this additional information regarding student performance levels of fourth and fifth grade special education students, will provide receiving teachers a better assessment of student strengths and needs.

The second expected outcome was that staff members involved in the initiative would share this feeling and would indicate a perception of improved insight into students' skills and needs with the inclusion of additional information in the records. This perception was assessed via administration of an informal survey at the close of the implementation period.

The writer surveyed 10 staff members involved in this investigation. It had been projected that eight or more respondents would indicate a perception of improved insight into students' skills and needs with the inclusion of additional information into the student records, by selecting choice "a" or "b" on the following survey statement: (see Appendix B)

> In my opinion, the inclusion of performance assessment and IEP summaries in student cumulative records-
>
> a. significantly improves my understanding of student skills and needs
> b. somewhat improves my understanding of student skills and needs
> c. provides little additional insight into student skills and needs.

Seven staff members selected choice "a" and three selected choice "b" on the survey. As such, staff members indicated a perception of improved understanding of students' skills and needs. The objective was successfully achieved. Complete survey results were tallied and are reported in table format as Appendix P.

The third expected outcome was that parents of special education students would express more confidence regarding the transition to the middle school after implementation. Evidence of change in the writer's work setting was to be documented in notes taken during eight parent conferences held in the course of implementation. Statements were recorded verbatim in the meeting notes of the writer.

It was projected that three or less special education parents would spontaneously express concern regarding transition to the middle school. This would represent a decline in statements of concern, expressed by a parent in comments to team members immediately before, during, or immediately after the conference. Unfortunately, there were four parents of fifth and fourth grade special education students that voiced concern over a transition to the middle school. This objective was not met as there continues to be significant concern expressed relative to student progress in the move from school to school.

One parent stated, "I don't want to even think of what will happen," describing her fear regarding her child's approaching transition to the middle school. Another noted, "They don't look after the kids the way you do." In another case, the student had met all the goals and objectives stated in the IEP. Nonetheless, the parent stated that she did not want special education services terminated in the fourth grade claiming, "They won't make any allowances in the middle school," referring to minor classroom modifications which might be needed at a later date. While this parent was projecting difficulties 18 months later, the concern was common to several others. One parent asked, "Do they have special ed there?" referring to the middle school. Clearly, these spontaneous comments and questions illustrate a persistent need for improved communication and increased information.

The fourth expected outcome was that staff members would provide positive feedback indicating an improved plan for transitioning fifth graders to the middle school. After reviewing the proposal submitted for new orientation activities for fifth graders moving on to the middle school, 10 fifth and sixth grade staff members were surveyed to gather feedback. Responses were tallied for the following statement in the informal staff survey: (see Appendix B)

> In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school-
>
> a. represents a significant improvement
> b. somewhat improves the former orientation
> c. represents little improvement over past activities.

It had been projected that eight of 10 staff responses indicating choice "a" or "b", would demonstrate successful achievement of this objective. In point of fact, after implementation, eight respondents selected choice "a", noting the potential of significant improvement in orientation plans. Two respondents selected choice "b." According to previously set criteria, this represents exemplary achievement for this outcome.

The fifth expected outcome was that staff members would provide positive feedback indicating support for planned orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade. Twelve staff members involved in initiatives in the writer's school reviewed a proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade. In an informal survey administered post implementation, the level of support was gauged in response to the following question: (see Appendix C)

> In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade this year-
>
> a. represents a significant improvement
> b. somewhat improves the former orientation
> c. represents little improvement over past activities.

It had been projected that 10 of 12 staff responses reflecting either choice "a" or "b", would demonstrate successful achievement on this objective. Ten respondents selected choice "a", noting significant improvement in orientation plans. Two respondents selected choice "b." The objective was clearly achieved and this level of achievement may be considered exemplary.

The sixth expected outcome was that staff members would provide positive feedback indicating approval and support for "Moving-On Day" plans. In a full faculty meeting just prior to the close of the implementation period, a comprehensive plan for school-wide orientation activities for "Moving-On Day" was reviewed. Staff members in the writer's building provided feedback regarding their approval and support of the plan in an informal survey administered at the meeting by responding to the following statement: (see Appendix D)

> In my opinion, the orientation activities planned for "Moving-On Day" this year represent-
>
> a. significant improvement. I heartily approve and support the plan as presented.
> b. notable improvement. I approve and support the plan as presented.
> c. little improvement. I will support the decision of the staff regarding this plan.

Criteria for achievement of the outcome was established prior to implementation. It was projected at that time that if 15 of 20 staff members surveyed responded with choice "a" or "b", the outcome desired would be achieved. In the survey, 15 staff members selected choice "a" and five selected choice "b" indicating exemplary achievement for this outcome.

The seventh and final expected outcome was that teachers at all levels in the writer's building would acknowledge increased involvement and participation in a collaborative planning process designed to promote a successful transition for all students. Criteria for successful achievement was established similar to the previous item and assessment of progress was documented in an informal survey administered at a full faculty meeting just prior to the close of implementation. The following item was used: (see Appendix D)

> In my opinion, the planning process outlined to arrange for successful transition for students, provides opportunities for-
>
> a. significant increases in staff involvement and participation
> b. moderate increases in staff involvement and participation
> c. little increase in staff involvement and participation.

Eight of 20 staff responses indicated choice "a" for this statement, while 12 staff members selected choice "b." This result denotes successful achievement of the objective.

As described, there was the potential to document success on seven distinct objectives designed to facilitate smooth school transitions for early adolescents. Successful achievement was demonstrated for six of the seven individual objectives indicating overall success of the project as a whole. There was a positive change in the writer's work setting.

Discussion

School transitions in early adolescence have been investigated by many researchers (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). The topic is an important one, of interest to most professional educators, since all students face the challenges associated with school transitions. It seems clear from a review of the research that early adolescents are in particular jeopardy during school transitions due to developmental hurdles which they face concurrently (Marsh, 1989; Schunk, 1991). The clear implication for educators is we must facilitate these transitions for our students.

It was the writer's intent to facilitate student transitions from grade to grade and from school to school. Collaborative planning initiatives to structure orientation activities are suggested in the literature (Case, 1989; George, Stevenson, Thomason & Beane, 1992) and were undertaken in the writer's work setting to effect positive change in this area. Results seem promising as staff members have indicated more involvement in planning for student transitions and have expressed support for the more comprehensive orientation activities planned. The investment and support of staff was a critical element in the success of the planning initiatives. Without staff support, the implementation of planned orientation activities will provide little help to transitioning students. Staff support cannot be underestimated.

The planning initiatives spawned several unexpected results. In general, there is an increased awareness of the need for transition planning evident in the writer's building. Transition planning and updates are a regular agenda item now at faculty meetings. Consistent attention has been focused on the issue because of the planning initiatives. The result has been a heightened awareness of student issues during transition. Additionally, there has been increased sharing of information and ideas with middle school staff and among special education staff members as a result of the planning initiatives. These are welcome and positive changes in the writer's work setting.

The planning initiatives effectively established an earlier time frame for annual transition planning (see Appendix O). This earlier time frame has presented two distinct benefits which may facilitate a smoother transition for special education students. Since class lists will be devised earlier, the regular education teachers will be able to attend annual reviews held in the spring for special education students who will be assigned to their class in the upcoming year. Attending this meeting will provide receiving teachers with an introduction to the student and family and a current picture of student capabilities. The earlier time frame will also allow for class observation of very exceptional students who will be transitioning to regular classes. This improved introduction of special education students should prove invaluable to special education and regular education teachers alike and may contribute to shared "ownership."

As noted, the transition from special education to regular education is a particular research interest of the writer and was a major component of this investigation. Special education students face great challenges during school transitions. These students are in double jeopardy as they face developmental and learning challenges while they negotiate regular school transitions. Wood and Beale (1991) have suggested that staff development programs can contribute to a successful transition to the regular education program for special education students.

In an effort to facilitate the transition of special education students, the writer provided staff development pertaining to special education needs and procedures and furnished teachers with more viable information from student IEPs. According to staff comments and data from the informal staff survey, these efforts were well received by staff members. Additionally, the writer observed that in interactions with students and during parent conferences, staff members now demonstrate an improved awareness of their students' special needs. The writer maintains though, that more effective assessments of students strengths and needs will further facilitate smooth transitions. Receiving teachers must have access to an accurate picture of students skills from a variety of sources to effectively plan. Student assessment was a further focus area in this investigation.

There is a vast body of research noting a need for improved student assessment vehicles (Biggs, 1992; Johnston, 1992; Reyes, 1992). Likewise, there is a large body of research supporting the need to help students through transitions. It is the writer's contention that effective assessments could facilitate smoother transitions for students by providing receiving teachers a more accurate picture of the student.

This project included several staff development initiatives pertaining to performance assessments and the use of portfolios. Feedback from workshop evaluations indicate the materials were well received. In response to these training opportunities, several unexpected results occurred. During the course of implementation, the use of portfolios to track reading and writing progress increased dramatically in the fifth grade. Initially, only one fifth grade staff member acknowledged an interest in using the portfolio process with a whole class group. This colleague sought out information from the writer and participated in staff development pertaining to authentic assessment. The completed first term portfolios for this group clearly inspired a similar effort in the remaining two fifth grade classrooms. At the close of implementation, portfolios were utilized as a performance assessment in three of three fifth grade classrooms as well as with all fourth and fifth grade special education students.

In an unexpected outcome, student portfolios will be used in two upcoming transition events. During "Moving-On Day" when fourth graders visit fifth grade teachers, student portfolios will be used to demonstrate fifth grade skills and activities. Also, portfolios will be displayed and reviewed at a fifth grade "Moving-On" party for families of students transitioning to the middle school. This link between instruction, assessment, parent involvement and transition planning demonstrates the great potential benefits to be achieved.

In fourth grade classes, the portfolio initiative was less enthusiastically received. It should be noted, though, that periodically performance assessments were utilized in these classes to assess reading and writing skills as well as the scientific method. Methods and materials have been shared. The idea of performance assessment and use of portfolios has been planted. Perhaps this seed will develop in the future.

Six of the seven expected outcomes were achieved as projected for this long term effort. A discussion of the unattained objective is merited. The writer had hoped that the initiatives involved in this project would contribute to improved awareness of middle school programs and orientation plans, and would generate more expressions of confidence regarding successful transitions to the middle school. As operationalized (spontaneous expressions of concern by parents), this objective was not met. Several unavoidable and unforeseen events most likely contributed to this result.

The substantial change in middle school administration with long term, interim appointments could not have been foreseen and no doubt interrupted the timely relay of information to fifth grade parents. The lack of updated, positive information describing programs and procedures at the middle school left parents to the stereotypical view of the middle school as a large, impersonal factory where unruly children wreck havoc. A change in this perception of the middle school environment will be predicated on accurate information and active public relations efforts.

Several observations made during the course of this implementation lead the writer to the conclusion that these misperceptions regarding the middle school will be addressed in the near future, presenting the potential for achievement of this outcome within a longer time period. It was noted that the new administration shares an interest in transition planning and has undertaken the same gathering information and ideas from all fifth grade teachers in the school system. At the meeting with middle school staff, the new principal acknowledged the misperceptions expressed in the community. Knowing the problem exists is half the battle. This administrator has demonstrated a willingness to address parents directly by agreeing to attend the meetings of parent groups and the "Moving-On" evening at the writer's school. He also issued a written invitation to parents of fifth grade students to tour the building and visit classrooms during National Education Week. These observations are indicative of an administration involved in active problem solving and public relations. This will be a key to improved transitions for students in the future.

In summary, the initiatives proposed and implemented by the writer were designed to facilitate school transitions of early adolescents from grade to grade and school to school, as well as from special education to regular education. Efforts involved staff development and improved information to effectively increase staff awareness of students strengths and needs. Collaborative planning efforts were undertaken to design and structure orientation activities for students in preparation for school transitions.

At the close of the implementation period, an informal survey of staff revealed that the initiatives resulted in improved awareness of students strengths and needs with the inclusion of IEP summaries and performance assessment data in students' cumulative records. Staff members acknowledged improved orientation activities planned for students and acknowledged their support for implementation of these plans. Staff members noted an increase in their involvement and participation in the transition planning process in the writer's building. It is the writer's belief that these results will contribute to more successful school transitions for early adolescents in this community.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations which follow logically from the practicum reported herein. In general there is a need for further investigation regarding the most effective ways to facilitate student transitions. As Covey (1989) describes it, how we see the problem, is the problem. Future investigators must continue to reconceptualize this problem refining and extending the work described here considering the multitude of contributory factors involved in school transitions, tailoring new solution strategies to the work settings and students involved. In the writer's work setting:

1. active facilitation of student transitions should continue to be a goal,
2. evaluation of the transition planning process should be regular and ongoing,
3. evaluation of orientation activities should be regular and ongoing,
4. administrators should continue to provide staff development opportunities for all staff, and
5. administrators should provide additional collaborative planning time to support the integration of special education students.

The writer intends to continue efforts in the work setting toward this end.

Dissemination

Collaborative planning and staff development are seen as vehicles to improve and facilitate student transitions. The problem is not unique to the writer's school setting. It is the writer's intent to share the information developed in the implementation of this practicum by reviewing it with colleagues in the local school community. The report will be submitted in entirety to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) for publication if approved. It will be available to professional colleagues through the Nova Southeastern University practicum library in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Additionally the writer intends to submit a brief synopsis of the work to appropriate journals for possible publication and may have the opportunity in the future to present at regional education conferences.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY

Appendix A

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY

Date of Administration: ________________

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate answer reflecting your honest opinion. Thank you for your time and continuing support.

1. In my opinion, student records passed on from grade to grade -
    a. effectively characterize student skills
    b. somewhat characterize student performance levels
    c. provide little insight into students' strengths and weaknesses.

2. Parents have commented to me that they are concerned about the transition to the middle school for their child -
    a. often
    b. several times
    c. never.

3. In my opinion, the current orientation program for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school -
    a. provides excellent assistance for students
    b. provides adequate orientation for students
    c. provides little help to students transitioning.

4. If it was free and convenient, I would be interested in additional training in-
    a. performance assessments
    b. special education procedures and methods
    c. other: ________________________________.

5. I would be interested in working with a committee to develop a plan for "Moving-On Day" for next year -
    a. yes
    b. perhaps
    c. not a chance.

6. In my opinion, the current procedure for exchanging information, designing class lists and planning for student transitions (within the building) -
    a. provides for smooth transitions
    b. needs to be re-evaluated and may be improved upon
    c. is sorely in need of improvement.

APPENDIX B

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY-FORM B

Appendix B

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY - FORM B

(To be distributed to fifth and sixth grade staff members participating in the practicum)

Date of Administration: ____________

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate answer reflecting your honest opinion. Thank you for your time and continuing support.

1. In my opinion, the inclusion of performance assessment and IEP summaries in student cummulative records-

   a. significantly improves my understanding of student skills and needs
   b. somewhat improves my understanding of student skills and needs
   c. provides little additional insight into student skills and needs.

2. In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school-

   a. represents a significant improvement
   b. somewhat improves the former orientation
   c. represents little improvement over past activities.

3. In my opinion, there is a need for additional staff development in-

   a. performance assessment methods
   b. special education procedures and methods
   c. other: ____________

Comments:

____

____

____

APPENDIX C

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY-FORM C

Appendix C

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY - FORM C

(To be distributed to fourth and fifth grade staff members participating in the practicum)

Date of Administration: ______________

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate answer reflecting your honest opinion. Thank you for your time and continuing support.

1. In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade this year -

    a. represents a significant improvement
    b. somewhat improves the former orientation
    c. represents little improvement over past activities.

APPENDIX D

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY-FORM-D

Appendix D

INFORMAL STAFF SURVEY - FORM D

(To be distributed to full staff at faculty meeting regarding the practicum)

Date of Administration: ______________

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate answer reflecting your honest opinion. Thank you for your time and continuing support.

1. In my opinion, the orientation activities planned for "Moving-On Day" this year represent -
    a. significant improvement. I heartily approve and support the plan as presented.
    b. notable improvement. I approve and support the plan as presented.
    c. little improvement. I will support the decision of the staff regarding this plan.
2. In my opinion, the planning process outlined to arrange for successful transition for students, provides opportunities for -
    a. significant increases in staff involvement and participation
    b. moderate increases in staff involvement and participation
    c. little increase in staff involvement and participation.

Comments:

____

____

____

APPENDIX E

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS TRAINING OUTLINE

Appendix E

Performance Assessments Training Outline

Goal: **To increase participants' knowledge of and ability to utilize performance assessments in the classroom.**

Session One Objectives:

- define performance assessments
- provide a brief overview of the literature regarding:
    - national assessment trends
    - state and local assessment trends
    - performance assessments
- discuss performance assessments currently used in classrooms

Session Two Objectives:

- provide a hands-on opportunity to complete a performance assessment in a small group
- discuss the connection to curriculum and the type of information available in the performance assessment
- speculate on potential problems with classroom administration

Session Three Objectives:

- review and discuss the purpose of performance assessments
- provide guest speaker or video presentation regarding the utilization of performance assessments

Session Four Objectives:

- review the process to construct a performance assessment
    - define a learning outcome appropriate for success in the real world
    - determine a task, linked to the curriculum which is prerequisite to the outcome defined above
    - list standards for a quality performance of the task
- construct a performance assessment in a small group
- discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the performance assessment tasks designed, to refine them
- generate ideas for administration, recording results, and providing feedback to students
- establish classroom follow-up schedule
- evaluate the workshop

APPENDIX F

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS TRAINING OUTLINE

Appendix F

Portfolio Assessments Training Outline

Goal: To increase participants' knowledge of and ability to utilize portfolio assessments in the classroom.

Session One Objectives:

- define portfolio assessments
- provide a brief overview of the literature regarding portfolio assessment in:
    - reading and writing
    - math and science
    - fine arts and other disciplines
- discuss portfolio assessments currently used in classrooms

Session Two Objectives:

- provide a hands-on opportunity to complete an activity in a small group appropriate for inclusion in portfolio
- discuss the connection to curriculum and the type of information available for assessment in the portfolio
- speculate on potential problems involved in the design and storage of portfolios

Session Three Objectives:

- review and discuss the purpose of portfolio assessments
- provide guest speaker or video presentation regarding the utilization of portfolio assessments

Session Four Objectives:

- review the process to construct a portfolio for assessment
    - select an appropriate curriculum area
    - introduce and define involvement of students
    - set criteria for work inclusion
    - provide a tangible link to instructional objectives to gauge progress when comparing work over time
- generate ideas for administration, recording results, and providing feedback to students
- establish classroom follow-up schedule
- evaluate the workshop

APPENDIX G

SUGGESTED ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED IN LANGUAGE ARTS PORTFOLIOS

Appendix G

Suggested items to be included in Language Arts Portfolios: Fifth Grade

A statement of student and teacher responsibilities in keeping the portfolios, initialed by both participants

A list of language arts curriculum objectives for fifth grade

A list of classroom writing assignments for each term, including specific criteria, with check boxes to initial completion

Writing samples as suggested by LeMahieu, Eresh, and Wallace (1992, p. 11) including:

- "a satisfying piece,
- an unsatisfying piece,
- an entire biography of a work,
- a free pick
- a negotiated free pick chosen in interaction with the teacher"
- rough drafts
- feedback from peers
- feedback from teachers
- student reflections
- story summaries
- story maps

A list of writing conference dates with brief comments

A list of books read each term

An informal reading inventory (Cloze format using text)

Student evaluation checklists for an oral presentation

Teacher evaluation checklists for an oral presentation

APPENDIX H

SUGGESTIONS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ORIENTATION

Appendix H

Suggestions for Middle School Orientation:

Orientation activities should be planned for a full day. The visitation day should be scheduled during the first week of June, preferably a day with a special activity such as a band or chorus performance.

The fifth grade students and their teachers should report to the middle school, on the middle school time schedule, for the visitation day.

At the morning bell, the students should enter at the front door and report to the auditorium. This is the procedure they will follow on the first day of school in the fall.

After the regular morning announcements, the students should be assigned to small groups of no more than 10 students and assigned three, sixth grade guides for a tour of the building (90 fifth graders in 9 groups of 10). One fifth grade teacher, aide, or parent will acompany each group of 10 students on the tour. The tour will last 90 minutes. There should be 10 minutes per stop at:

- principal's office
- guidance counselor's office
- assistant principal's office
- main office/health suite
- cafeteria
- gym/locker rooms
- library
- computer center
- art/music/home econ./shop

Though this schedule represents a 90 minute interruption of regular duties for several staff members and presentations will be repetitious, it affords the opportunity for a personal welcome and introduction at each area. Transitioning students should have ample time to ask questions.

Following the tour, fifth graders will wait in the auditorium while the guides get seven other students from their third period class. Each fifth grade student will be paired individually with a partner to attend two regular classes and lunch. Teachers should prepare small group activities to accomodate 10 extra students during these periods.

All fifth and sixth grade students involved in the orientation day will attend a band or chorus concert or special activity together in the afternoon.

The last period of the day, fifth graders will remain in the auditorium, again, split into their small groups. They will have another opportunity for questions and have a chance to practice operating the combination locks used in the building before being dismissed.

APPENDIX I

SUGGESTIONS FOR "MOVING-ON DAY"

Appendix I

Suggestions for "Moving-On Day":

Orientation activities should be planned for a full afternoon.

Class lists should be prepared ahead of time so that students may spend the afternoon with the teacher they are scheduled to have the following year.

"Moving-On Day" should be scheduled approximately 1 to 2 weeks before the close of the school year, so that after orientation, the students and teachers will have an opportunity to greet each other in the hallways informally.

Orientation activities should include:

- a personal introduction and welcome from the new teacher including information on the teacher's family, hobbies, and professional background (as appropriate to level)
- student introductions (perhaps in the format of a name memory game)
- an overview of the curriculum units (as appropriate)
- an opportunity to examine books and materials used in the new grade
- a hands-on activity or lesson with the new teacher appropriate to the grade level, to reinforce a perception of readiness for the new grade level
- a "word to the wise" (advice for how to be successful) from the teacher's current students in written or video format
- an overview of regular fieldtrips and special activities
- a question and answer period
- suggestions for summer reading (as appropriate)
- a comprehensive parent information component

APPENDIX J

TOPIC LIST FOR "TRANSITION PITFALLS" INSTRUCTION MODULE

Appendix J

Topic list for "Transition Pitfalls" Instruction Module:

Individual lessons or activities should be included so that students may demonstrate mastery or develop skills in:

Logistics:

- reading a map of the middle school
- reading a middle school schedule
- reading the middle school handbook
- operating the combination lock

Social Awareness:

- recognizing peer pressure and dealing with it
- recognizing your own strengths
- developing basic social skills of adolescents
- valuing differences

Conflict Resolution:

- understanding your style of conflict
- developing active listening skills
- introducing the process of conflict resolution
- understanding the basics of mediation and negotiation

Study Skills:

- keeping a homework notebook
- developing strategies for time management
- finding information in the library
- identifying strategies for studying

APPENDIX K

WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Appendix K

WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Workshop Topic: ____________________ Date: ____________________

DIRECTIONS: *Please take a few minutes to evaluate the four sessions of this workshop. Please circle the number that reflects your opinion for each statement. The feedback will be used to improve the training. Thank you for you help.*

* * *

	Strongly disagree		Strongly Agree	
1. The presenter was well prepared and organized.	1	2	3	4
2. The presenter provided background material helpful to understand the assessment method.	1	2	3	4
3. The presenter provided an opportunity for hands-on activities.	1	2	3	4
4. The materials and ideas presented were appropriate for my level.	1	2	3	4
5. I will use the materials provided for assessment in my classroom.	1	2	3	4
6. I would recommend this form of assessment to colleagues.	1	2	3	4

Comments:

APPENDIX L

PORTFOLIOS AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT, INFORMATION FOR SHARING

Appendix L

Portfolios and Performance Assessment

Information for Sharing

prepared
by
Vicky Gallagher

1994

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A Brief Review of the Literature

There is a widespread call for authentic assessments (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991; Wolf, LeMahieu, & Eresh, 1992; Worthen, 1993) which may contribute to a better estimation of students' strengths and weaknesses. According to LeMahieu, Eresh, and Wallace (1992, p. 8), "even a cursory review of educational headlines in America in recent years reveals a high level of dissatisfaction with the current means of assessing student progress".

The difficulty with traditional tests is their irrelevance to practical skills and poor illustration of how a child is learning (Grindler & Stratton, 1992; Hanson, 1992: Johnston, 1992; McGuire, 1992). If indeed our purpose in assessment is to improve instruction, to facilitate student learning, we must find better assessment methods. According to Flood and Lapp (1989), "a single score, whether it is a course grade or a percentile score from a norm referenced test, almost always fails to accurately report students' overall progress" (p. 509). The utilization of standardized test scores and report card grades fails to portray the skill levels and needs of many students.

The Department of Education in Vermont undertook a major project to revitalize the assessments utilized throughout the state beginning in 1990. This major reassessment of assessment practices was response to realization that standardized tests were not accurately assessing the educational outcomes valued by citizens in Vermont (Forseth, 1992). Much broader assessments were needed to gauge the effectiveness of instruction in writing and mathematical problem solving to insure student growth in these crucial areas of development. The California Assessment Project is another major foray into portfolio and performance assessments. Kentucky, Colorado, Rhode Island and many other states have instituted major assessment reform initiatives.

Johnston (1992) calls for more authentic assessments which are theory-based and self-referenced and cautions against the ploys of major publishers to appease those calling for alternative assessments with newly-packaged, disguised, traditional measures. Biggs (1992) and Reyes (1992) note that authentic assessments are particularly necessary to fairly assess the abilities and needs of culturally or linguistically different students. As student populations become more diverse, reflecting a change in societal demographics as well as the integration of special education students, the need for authentic assessments becomes more and more urgent.

Several authors cite performance assessments as a solution to current deficits in assessment practices (Berliner, 1992; Carriedo, 1992). Moses (1992) clarifies the distinction between generic alternative assessments, which by definition can essentially be anything, and true performance assessments. He suggests that educators design performance assessment instruments by first determining tasks that would be a good predictor of future success in the real world and then specifying standards which would demonstrate quality performance in the achievement of that task. The clear linkage between curriculum, instruction, and assessment is essential in the design and implementation of performance assessments. Optimally, "high quality assessments can enhance student growth and achievement" (Moses, 1992, p.18).

The great potential of performance assessments are described by many authors. While perhaps underutilized at the present time, performance assessments are not new phenomenon. Mabry (1992) studied an alternative assessment program that was established at an alternative high school in Wisconsin some 20 years ago. She notes the Rite of Passage Experience (ROPE) assessment process at Walden III High School has included performance assessments, requiring practical application of learning, and portfolio assessments in writing skills, for 20 years.

A number of portfolio projects are described in recent journal articles providing testament to their use as a solution to assessment problems. Portfolios can provide a tangible record of student progress over time enlightening parents and teachers (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Flood & Lapp, 1989). Their systematic use can contribute to improved instruction, increased collaboration, and parent involvement (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

Eismeier (1992) suggests setting modest initial goals when adding portfolio assessment to an already extensive list of responsibilities for educators. He suggests that collecting students' work and creating the portfolio is an appropriate goal when beginning this process. He further notes regularly discussing the portfolios is also worthwhile as it stimulates ideas and collegiality. These basic initiatives comprise the foundation upon which to build more comprehensive assessment programs.

> Portfolios provide a powerful way to link learning with assessment. They can provide evidence of performance that goes far beyond factual knowledge and offers a clear and understandable picture of student achievement. They also provide opportunities for improved student self-image and self-worth. They can enhance self-esteem by having students take active roles in selecting and evaluating what they have learned.
> (Adams & Hamm, 1992, p. 105)

Clearly, this form of assessment could be most effective in portraying the skills and needs of early adolescents while encouraging their personal development and connection with peers and teachers in school (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991). This type of assessment can contribute to learning and developmental growth providing double benefit to students.

Over the last decade there have been notable shifts in curriculum and instruction. There has been a trend toward whole language instruction with authentic children's literature as the central medium for instruction rather than basal readers. There has been a trend toward process writing, shifting away from stressing the mechanics of writing and spelling, emphasizing communication skill, instead. There has been a shift toward real problem solving in science and math using manipulatives, tools, and authentic problems; a shift away from rote computation and theoretical knowledge mastery. With these shifts in curriculum comes the need to restructure and align assessment. Effective methods for assessing student growth which reflect new curricular materials and instructional methods are needed (Adams & Hamm, 1992; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

Writing Portfolios

A number of prominent authors have dealt with the question of what to include in student writing portfolios. A consolidation of many of these ideas is presented in the following table.

Table 1

Suggested Items to be Included in Language Arts Portfolios: Intermediate Grades

A statement of student and teacher responsibilities in keeping the portfolios, initialed by both participants

A list of language arts curriculum goals/objectives by grade

A list of classroom writing assignments for each term, including specific criteria, with check boxes to initial completion

Writing samples as suggested by LeMahieu, Eresh, and Wallace (1992, p. 11) including:

- "a satisfying piece,
- an unsatisfying piece,
- an entire biography of a work,
- a free pick
- a negotiated free pick chosen in interaction with the teacher"
- rough drafts demonstrating writing process
- feedback from peers
- feedback from teachers
- student reflections
- story summaries and story maps
- timed writing samples from a focused prompt

A list of writing conference dates with brief comments

A list of books read each term

An informal reading inventory (Cloze format using text)

Student evaluation checklists for an oral presentation

Teacher evaluation checklists for an oral presentation

Teachers should select items for inclusion based on the established curriculum. A typical curriculum for the intermediate grades may include instructional objectives for the following:

Table 2

Writing Curriculum Elements List

- a personal letter
- a descriptive paragraph
- an interview
- a selection using quotations
- a selection using sensory words
- an outline for a long writing project
- a research report including all prewriting, planning, rough drafts, and final published report
- a story summary
- a comparison
- a selection using simile and/or metaphor
- a selection using idioms
- a poem
- a book report
- a story map
- a set of directions to complete a task
- a fantasy selection
- a biography
- a set of notes for an oral presentation
- a description of the writing process
- a selection using humor
- a selection using suspense
- a selection showing fact and opinion
- a student book
- a selection done on the word processor independently

These items should provide a framework for decision making. Clearly not all assignments should be selected for inclusion in the portfolio. The selection process is meant to be collaborative and instructive. Items selected should provide a vehicle for reflection.

In some classrooms, portfolios are reviewed on a monthly basis. Progress in writing is reviewed on a regular basis by means of student conferences. The teacher has an opportunity during these individual conference times to note skill areas which are mastered and those which may need reinforcement. Some teachers have students maintain "Work in Progress" folders. At the end of the month the work is reviewed, items are selected for inclusion in the portfolio. At the end of the term, the portfolio provides a rich source of material for gauging progress and grading the student. The portfolio can also be an effective tool for discussion during parent conferences.

Several types of assessment are afforded in the portfolio. Freedman (1993) notes the opportunity to select holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, or an analytic scale to review individual pieces of student work. These three primary assessment methods are described below.

Table 3

Types of Assessment

Holistic scoring- The reviewer rates the work on the basis of an overall impression of the piece. Individual components are not rated separately.

Primary trait scoring- Specific criteria for scoring are established ahead of time in this method. There is a primary task or focus for rating the writing assignment (ie- persuasion).

Analytic scale- The reviewer scores the piece utilizing generic skill categories common to all good writing. Ideas, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure and variety, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and handwriting are all scored. A composite for the entire piece can be tallied.

Many teachers also combine individual assessments and group assessments to generate grades for cooperative work. For instance, a group project could require specific individual writing elements which could be individually rated and perhaps included in portfolios. The entire group project could be rated as well. All children share the grade for the group work. As with the individual elements, group work may be scored using the methods described above. Table 4 provides some suggestions for evaluating writing portfolios.

Table 4

Suggestions for Evaluating Writing Portfolios:

1. Have the students classify the various kinds of writing included in their portfolio using colored dots - blue for expository, red for persuasive, etc. This activity may reinforce an awareness of purpose for writing.

2. Have reviewers (students, teachers, and parents) attach a brief comment or reaction to the piece of writing using self-sticking note sheets. This activity may help to illustrate the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the writing and provide an opportunity for encouragement while reinforcing literacy skills.

3. Have the students write a cover letter describing why they selected the items to be included in their portfolio. This activity, again, reinforces a writing skill while focusing the student on reflection.

4. Have the students create a topic list for future writing as they read and evaluate their work and the work of others. Ideas for sequels, and answers to questions arising from writing, recorded on the topic list, can facilitate future writing projects.

5. Have the students utilize a checklist of writing skills in evaluating their work and setting new skills targets. This documentation may be helpful in improving instruction.

6. Have the students use a numerical scoring rubric to evaluate their work. This activity demonstrates the process of formal evaluation as it focuses on specific elements involved in effective writing.

Supplementary Articles and Resources

Two brief articles are suggested which provide excellent ideas and sample methods for writing assessment:

1. Assessing writing performance across the curriculum by Karen Wood.
2. Evaluating the writing of middle school students by Alan Weber

(For sources please see the reference section at the back of this document.)

Math Portfolios

Similar to writing portfolios, many authors have made suggestions for items to be included in math portfolios. A sample list follows:

Table 5

Suggested Items to be Included in Math Portfolios: Intermediate Grades

A statement of student and teacher responsibilities in keeping the portfolios, initialed by both participants

A list of math curriculum goals/objectives for the grade

A list of math projects for the term, including specific criteria, with check boxes to initial completion

Math work samples including a selection demonstrating-
- homework assignments
- classwork assignments
- small group projects
- rough drafts of problem solving
- traditional quizzes and tests
- timed math fact drills
- performance assessments derived from real-life
- use of the calculator
- use of money, charts, graphs, and other data
- use of the computer for problem solving

Math games or activities designed by the student, including written directions

Written description of the steps they would go through to solve a given problem

Student reflections which may include personal goals

Feedback from teachers, family members and peers

Student evaluation checklists for oral presentations

Teacher evaluation checklists for oral presentations

Math portfolios present students with a nice opportunity to use math skills to track math skills. Students can be directed to give each other timed math fact drills and then graph or chart their progress over time.

Math skills demonstrations, large projects, or work with manipulatives may be difficult to physically include in student portfolios, but teacher and student evaluation forms and/or written summaries of demonstrations would be appropriate items to include in portfolios.

Oral presentations of the portfolios to a small group of peers or the entire class can provide valuable insights for teachers planning future projects and instruction and provide students with an opportunity to be in the spotlight. Attention should be given to students' use of appropriate math language in written and oral presentations as part their math portfolios. Knowledge of math vocabulary and skill in using it are often weak areas for students which may be addressed through the use of portfolios.

In all portfolios, it is essential that students be involved in the selection and evaluation of their work. Conferences may be helpful in guiding students as they approach the task of organizing, categorizing and evaluating their work to make selections for inclusion in a showcase portfolio. Students can be directed to evaluate and reflect on their work with the prompts included in Table 6.

Table 6

Sample Questions to Encourage Reflection:

Why is this a favorite work sample?
How does this work show that you tried hard?
How can you demonstrate that you have improved?
Why was this the hardest thing for you?
What other strategies could be used to solve this problem?

Involving students in reflection on their work is essential in the portfolio process. Involving and informing parents can be a wonderful addition or side benefit with this assessment process.

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APPENDIX M

SAMPLE IEP SUMMARY

Appendix M

Sample IEP Summary

Ms. XXXXXXX - 5X

STUDENT: XXXXX XXXXXXX (MOTHER- XXXXXXXXXXXXX)

MIN. OF SERVICE: 60/wk. IEP REVIEW DATE: 12/95
SPEECH: 30 (Devastated when pulled out of class)
COUNSEL: -
OTHER: -

LEARNING STYLE: Visual channel, common sense learner, lots of repetition helps XXXXX - then you get the aha!

STRENGTHS: Drawing ability, cooperation

WEAKNESSES: Expressive language is still a stumbling block, difficulty with word retreival

CURRENT PERFORMANCE LEVELS:
READING- 4.2 Rdg. Comp.- Woodcock WRITING- Short and sweet paragraphs
MATH- 5.2 Operations - KeyMah SPELL- Grade level
OTHER-

SUMMARY OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:
Structured writing activities, editing skills, auditory processing with speech/lang. therapist, support for study skills

TESTING/CLASSROOM MODIFICATIONS: Untimed tests, study sheets provided

BEHAVIOR/DISCIPLINE ISSUES: None

MEDICAL ISSUES: Long history of ear infections have hampered hearing ability at times

APPENDIX N

TEAM SUGGESTIONS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ORIENTATION

Appendix N

Team Suggestions for Middle School Orientation:

The goal of collaborative transition planning is the development of comprehensive orientation activities for all fifth graders and their families. Orientation activities should be planned for a full day to provide a substantive visit where students can truly interact with sixth grade teachers. This type of experience might demonstrate to the fifth graders their capability and readiness for the transition while allaying the many fears they express about the move. An attempt should be made to avoid a simple walk through where fifth grade students (and teachers) may feel they are on display.

The visitation day should be scheduled during the first week of June, preferably a day with a special activity such as a band or chorus performance. Ideally, orientation activities for parents would be included in the transition planning and would occur simultaneously. Visitation early in June would allow students and parents time to reflect on the orientation and follow up with any questions they have after the visit.

An "even exchange" of fifth and sixth grade students should afford fifth graders the opportunity to spend the entire day with sixth grade staff members. Fifth graders would be given a regular schedule, and would switch classes and experience a typical day for a sixth grader. Sixth graders returning to their former fifth grade teachers, could provide unparalled information to fifth grade teachers regarding the adequacy of preparation for the transition.

An alternative to the "even exchange" plan would entail a full day visit for fifth graders. In this orientation option, the fifth grade students and their teachers would report to the middle school, on the middle school time schedule, for the visitation day. At the morning bell, the students would enter at the front door and report to the auditorium. This is the procedure they may follow on the first day of school in the fall.

After any regular morning announcements, the students would be assigned to small groups of no more than 10 students and assigned three, sixth grade guides for a tour of the building (90 fifth graders in 9 groups of 10). One fifth grade teacher, aide, or parent would accompany each group of 10 students on the tour.

The tour would last 90 minutes. There should be 10 minutes per stop at:

- principal's office
- guidance counselor's office
- assistant principal's office
- main office/health suite

- cafeteria
- gym/locker rooms
- library
- computer center
- art/music/home econ./shop

Though this schedule represents a 90 minute interruption of regular duties for several staff members and presentations will be repetitious, it affords the opportunity for a personal welcome and introduction at each area. Transitioning students should have ample time to ask questions.

Following the tour, fifth graders would wait in the auditorium supervised by fifth grade staff while the guides get seven other students from their regular class. Each fifth grade student would then be paired, individually, with a partner to attend two regular classes and lunch. Sixth grade teachers would prepare small group activities to accommodate 10 extra students during these periods.

All fifth and sixth grade students involved in the orientation day would attend a band or chorus concert or special activity together in the afternoon.

The last period of the day, fifth graders would remain in the auditorium, again, split into their small groups. They would have another opportunity for questions and have a chance to practice operating the combination locks used in the building before being dismissed.

Respectfully submitted,

Vicky Gallagher
XXXXXXX School

APPENDIX O

SUGGESTED TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS

Appendix O

Suggested Transition Planning Process

RATIONALE:

- There is a need to set a planning process which involves collaboration with regular education teachers to develop ownership of special students.
- There is a need to establish a timeline for information needs and set a tentative meeting schedule for team planning.
- There is a need to determine the expected staff resources for next year to complete collaborative planning.
- There is a need to determine the expected number of special students at each grade level in a timely fashion (including grade one).
- There is a need to share what the specific needs of special students are to facilitate grouping for next year and facilitate transitions.

PROPOSED PLANNING PROCESS:

1. Principal and Special Education Director meet to project sped staff resources available. Target date: March 15
2. Gather information regarding number of sped students at each grade level and briefly summarize their needs. Target date: April 1
3. Present information gathered (staff resources and special education students projected) to staff at a full faculty meeting. Target date: April 15
4. Begin collaborative planning meetings at grade levels. Target date: April 25
    - Review target timeline and establish meeting schedule.
    - Sped staff will meet with teachers at each grade level to review number and needs of upcoming sped students. Initial meetings will be cross grade level to allow one grade level team to advise the next on the most appropriate groupings, ie- Kdg. meets with 1st and Sped, 1st meets with 2nd and Sped...
    - At a second meeting, grade levels will plan sped student placement and service delivery, ie- 1st & Sped decide how to place next years 2nd grade sped students, 2nd & Sped place next years 3rd grade sped students...
5. Class lists of all students will be formulated at each grade level. Target date: May 30
6. Orientation plans are established at grade levels for annual "Moving-On Day." Target date: June 1

APPENDIX P

RESULTS OF INFORMAL STAFF SURVEYS

Appendix P

Results of Informal Staff Surveys

Form B: Administered to fifth and sixth grade staff members

# of responses:	Survey item as presented:
10	1. In my opinion, the inclusion of performance assessment and IEP summaries in student cummulative records-
7	a. significantly improves my understanding of student skills and needs
3	b. somewhat improves my understanding of student skills and needs
0	c. provides little additional insight into student skills and needs.
10	2. In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for fifth graders transitioning to the middle school-
8	a. represents a significant improvement
2	b. somewhat improves the former orientation
0	c. represents little improvement over past activities.

Form C: Administered to fourth and fifth grade staff members

12	1. In my opinion, the proposal for orientation activities for students transitioning into fourth and fifth grade this year -
10	a. represents a significant improvement
2	b. somewhat improves the former orientation
0	c. represents little improvement over past activities.

Form D: Administered to full staff in writer's building

20	1. In my opinion, the orientation activities planned for "Moving-On Day" this year represent -
15	a. significant improvement. I heartily approve and support the plan as presented.
5	b. notable improvement. I approve and support the plan as presented.
0	c. little improvement. I will support the decision of the staff regarding this plan.
20	2. In my opinion, the planning process outlined to arrange for successful transition for students, provides opportunities for -
8	a. significant increases in staff involvement and participation
12	b. moderate increases in staff involvement and participation
0	c. little increase in staff involvement and participation.